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INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0516
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1873
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 2732
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4615
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000152

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT - PARA 2)
SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PTER PK
SUBJECT: SINDH - ETHNIC VIOLENCE ESCALATES

REF: A: Karachi 138
B: 08 Karachi 477
C: 08 Karachi 426
D: 08 Karachi 627

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Ethnic violence erupted again in Karachi and has left at least 30 people dead and more than 50 injured. The fighting between the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP) has sent tremors throughout the city as more violence is anticipated. Schools remained closed on Thursday and a "shoot on sight" order issued by the Provincial government remains in effect. End Summary

Dispute Ignites Violence

¶2. (SBU) In the past few weeks, low scale ethnic violence has threatened the fragile peace in Karachi and stories varying from a money-lending collection dispute to a land grab gone wrong have all been offered as possible causes for this latest round of bloodshed. On Wednesday, the violence erupted into full scale fighting that lasted throughout Wednesday night and into Thursday morning and generated a "shoot on sight" order from Provincial authorities trying to regain control of the situation.

¶3. (SBU) All told, the violence left between thirty and thirty-five people dead and dozens wounded, including two Rangers and six police. Of the dead, the vast majority are Pashtun. Estimates of property set on fire include twenty vehicles, five hotels, twenty-six shops, and four houses. Between 25 and 50 persons have been arrested and weapons and ammunition confiscated. Reports received by Post indicate all the arrested are Pashtuns.

¶4. (U) The fighting, normally confined to smaller segments of the city, began in North Karachi, but swiftly moved into the other areas, including New Karachi, Banaras, Gulshan-e-Jauhar, Orangi Town, Sarjani Town, and

Shah Faisal Colony, and to within 8 kilometers of the Consulate compound.

¶ 15. (SBU) Schools closed on Thursday and traffic was unusually light on Karachi's normally bustling streets. As nervous citizens remained at home, and many businesses remained shuttered, an emergency security meeting was called by the Provincial government. Lasting nearly six hours, and chaired by the Chief Minister, the meeting was attended by political party leadership, security and government officials and culminated with a press conference during which the key stakeholders made statements that eschewed violence and assured everyone that all was well.

Leaders Blame Each Other

¶ 16. (SBU) As MQM and the ANP began their normal round of finger-pointing, Government interlocutors were very clear they blame both the ANP and MQM for their obstinate stands and unwillingness to listen or work with each other.

¶ 17. (SBU) Raza Haroon, an MQM Minister, said the showdown has been coming for the past several weeks. He states the trouble began when Pashtuns started incursions from North Karachi to attack villages that support MQM. Mr. Haroon further opined that ANP leadership was no longer able to control their supporters. He said the police were absent from North Karachi when the violence began, and that if the Rangers had not intervened the death toll would be higher.

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¶ 18. (SBU) Shahi Syed, President of ANP, believes the situation is much more sinister than a land dispute. If a land dispute were the cause, he said, the violence would have been confined to one area of the city, and not spread as widely. He claims the violence is the result of a conspiracy to destabilize the country, and in particular to discredit the ANP for their role in the NWFP agreement. According to Syed, 32 Pashtuns were killed in Wednesday's violence.

Comment

¶ 19. (SBU) Fortunately, May 1 is Pakistan Labor Day and most businesses and government offices will be closed. There is some fear that violence might resurge following Friday prayers but the hope is that on Friday and throughout the weekend, government and party officials will work behind the scenes to dampen down tempers so that some semblance of calm can be regained.

¶ 10. (SBU) The ongoing tension between MQM and ANP has steadily escalated as the May 12 commemoration day for ANP members who were gunned down in the city draws near. The ANP blame the MQM for the deaths and rumors of planned violence have been circulating widely throughout the city. The government has been working frantically behind the scenes with both parties to reach a compromise that will satisfy the ANP call for a commemoration of the dead that does add further names to the list. Wednesday's violence garnered national attention, and the Prime Minister plans to visit Karachi on Friday.

FAKAN